

# BRONISLAW MALINOVSKI'S FUNCTIONAL VIEW

**Daniela KOCEVA PhD,**

**Faculty of Educational Sciences, University "Goce Delcev" Stip**

**[daniela.koceva@ugd.edu.mk](mailto:daniela.koceva@ugd.edu.mk)**



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## **Abstract:**

In the early decades of the twentieth century, there emerged a kind of a systematic significance for social life, which is called functionalism. It contains essential elements of holistic and organizational theories, but it is recognized as new because it includes some new perceptions of the approach in the societies' studies, as well as their basic characteristics. It occurs first in anthropology, in the form of generalizations of life in small tribal societies, associated with field research carried out in small primitive societies on the remote islands of the Pacific Ocean, and then, during the Second World War (a little before and after it), and in sociology - as an endeavor to build theoretical models for societies as systems, which will then be put into service for the empirical research of modern earth-moving societies.

Functionalism, both within anthropology and within sociology, creates its own strategy for the study of society, in which it is understood as a system of social institutions and a system of cultural specimens. Institutions grow up as regulative examples of social action, grounded in the need of survival. Culture, meanwhile, is the total material, mental and spiritual apparatus that is instrumentally associated with institutions. Society is a system of parts -of institutional-cultural parts that function as mutually dependent, each of which contributes to the survival of the system as a whole.

## **Key words:**

functionalism, anthropology, theory, social system, Malinovski.

**Theme/s:** Anthropology, Religion, Identity

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### Introduction

A fundamental notion in functionalist sociology is that of the social system. It is given in the terms of equilibrium, which determines it as more or less stable. Equilibrium is a dynamic equilibrium that is realized in such a way that between the structural components of the system, as well as between the systems of its environment, such relations exist and such processes are maintained that maintain the given structure. This structure is not something immutable, but something that changes over time. It has a static and dynamic axis. The dynamic axis is realized in such a way that, in the context of securing survival, certain parts of the system gradually become inadequate and even harmful, and they are replaced by others. Thus, over time the system changes - those parts that have proven to be successful survive in its composition, and those that are no more successful are removed.

Society, according to representatives of functionalism, can survive as a system, that is, as a whole of mutually connected and mutually harmonized parts, because people by nature are destined for life in a society. The two motives of human nature are: 1. the human desire for a wider social or cultural sample than that of the family group; and 2. the desire to achieve certain collective goals. The social order is maintained because of the people's desire to participate in it. Each social system, once it is formed, develops mechanisms for its own survival. They are primarily related to the harmonization of relations with the external environment and maintenance of the internal balance. Of such mechanisms, two are basic: social control and socialization. Malinowski, the functionalistic strategist, begins to apply it in the study of small primitive societies, and then, through the activity of many sociologists, returns to the complex Western societies in their contemporary edition, which is still to be held up to date.

The two anthropologists who are apostrophed as the founders of functionalism as a separate school, Malinowski and Redcliffe-Brown, developed their theory as opposing to the two schools that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were predominant in

anthropology, evolution, and diffusionism. They developed a critical attitude towards the evolutionary school not because they do not accept the evolutionary thesis that societies from a simple and relatively homogeneous form throughout their history advance in complexity and heterogeneity, but because they estimate that evolutionists in their quest to discover the universal laws of evolution and to show all of its steps, from the very beginning onwards, allow assumptions that cannot be confirmed through empirical evidence. According to them, similar institutions and cultural traits in two or more societies may result from the diffusion processes, but also from parallel development, conditioned by the basic needs of human nature, which in different societies are satisfied in a similar way.

### **Bronislaw Malinowski and his teaching**

Bronislaw Malinowski, a Polish-British anthropologist, is the first to use the term functionalism, including an organic form of analysis underneath, and the one who with his enthusiasm, his originality, and even with the idiosyncratic qualities of his temper, encouraged great interest in this type of analysis. Bronislaw Malinowski provoked stormy reactions. Anthropologists usually evaluate the work of Malinowski in 3 areas as:

1. a researcher;
2. a theoretician or
3. as a person.

Malinowski set new standards for ethnographic research and influenced a whole generation of anthropologists. He was a man who caused various reactions.

Malinowski was born in Krakow, he was the son of a prominent professor in Slavic languages, and grew up in the circle of Polish intellectuals. His dissertation was from mathematics and physics under the title "On the Principles of the Economy of Thinking" - he received the highest marks and awards in Austro-Ugria, solemnly awarded with the sounds of fanfare. But, disease and other circumstances led him to the study of sociology and anthropology. Malinowski enrolled in postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Economics in London, where he studied with Seligman, who was a member of the expedition at the

University of Cambridge at the Torres Flow (between New Guinea and Australia). From there came his first book based on the previously collected ethnographic data - "A family of Australian Aboriginal people". Malinowski worked as secretary to the anthropologist R. G. Marret while he was staying in Australia; World War I broke out, and, as a citizen of Austria, Malinowski was imprisoned. However, Marret stood up for him and he was allowed to stay on Australian territory and New Guinea, so he continued field research; he was 3 times in New Guinea for research.

In his magical study, he described the inhabitants of the islands of Troriband - the "Agronauts of the Western Pacific". Malinowski believed that one day ethnography must take into account: consistency, legality and order which are determined in every aspect and contribute to the creation of a coherent whole. To accomplish this, Malinowski advocated a three-part system.

1. He first met to develop a map of affinities that schematically depicts all complex relationships.
2. Then the synoptic maps - which were to illustrate other dimensions of culture: economic transactions, exchanges, legal customs, magical rituals, the right to process fertile soils, etc.

The synoptic maps show the relationship between ethnographic data. Malinowski was always interested in the pulsating complexity of social life. The nuances in behavior and action - he called them trifles of everyday life. With this syntagma he wanted to direct ethnographers to observe the subjective dynamics of everyday life that a group of human beings lives, not only to note the abstract structure of the original society. Though he noticed that not every ethnographer could dig into the native life with the same lightness, he tried to remind ethnographers that the subject of their research is living people, not museum exhibits.

Malinowski's knowledge of the nature of magic and science increased the interest in cognitive anthropology, and influenced the approaches to environmental anthropology (sixties and seventies). The islanders of Troriband remained one of the classic ethnographic case studies - and thanks to which Malinowski, when he returned from England, became the leading person of social anthropology. Malinowski began teaching at the University of London, he was the head of the Department of Social Anthropology, which enabled him to attract many students and increase his international reputation.

The works of Malinowski remained ethnographic classics "while for his contribution to anthropological theory he argued while he was still alive."

In ethnography he dealt with:

- The ways in which culture meets the needs of the individual, and thus he came into conflict with the views of the A.R. Braun who explored the way in which culture meets the needs of society.

Both were declared functionalists - thus emphasizing their thinking about how culture works-to meet certain needs. Therefore, they regard cultures as functionally integrated entities - yet each of them found the sources of those needs elsewhere: Malinowski emphasized the individual, and Brown emphasized the society.

To see the differences between them, we consider the theoretical approach of Malinowski starting from his theory of needs. Malinowski was aware that the analysis he applied, and to which he gave a new name, was not something radically new in anthropology and sociology. He acknowledged older sociologists for the founding of sociology, as well as their efforts to maintain the continuity of scientific knowledge through the continuation of older teachings. His list of sociologists to whom he acknowledged great merits is long; it included Spencer, Taylor, Morgan, Sumner, Wustemark, Hobbes, Durkheim, also Freud, and he is one of the first to discover the contribution of the famous neuropsychiatrist in explaining society. Malinowski openly states that, although Fraser's evolutionary perspective is acceptable to him, he cannot but emphasize his contribution to social science, based on faith in the essential similarity between the human mind and the human nature. Malinowski's concept of science and its application is consistent with all those scientists before and after him, who emphasize its pragmatic side. Significance and prediction are two aspects of the same process of practical control through action. Functional analysis, as Malinowski understands it, is quite close to the comparative method, whose necessity for sociological research is emphasized by all sociologists. Structural-functional analysis is generalization, and the comparative method must always be the basis of any generalization, of any theoretical principle or of any general law that must be applied to our subject.

Structural and functional analysis is close to the evolutionary method, because all human needs - those for economic organization, education, magical or legal services - are satisfied through systems of activities that become more specialized in the course of time.

It is also close to the psychological analysis, whose contribution, as Freud estimated, was to become aware of the formation of personality attitudes through the process of socialization. Considering Freud's psychoanalysis, Malinovski pointed out that "psychoanalysts are limited to searching for organic traits as determinants of culture". They face such factors as authority and the use of force; they follow the organic wishes and their transformation into values, norms and agencies of repression, etc. The efforts to locate their analysis within the sociological course, furthermore, led Malinovski to comparisons with other branches of psychological theory, primarily with behaviorism.

He concluded, in the same way as the representatives of behaviorism, that socialization is, above all, the transformation of desires into values and norms. On the other hand, like them, he will direct his analysis towards the symbols as an integral part of the culture.

His conclusion, at the end of this reexamination, is that functionalism as a method is as old as the first awakening of the interest in the unknown. His functionalism should "contribute to the understanding of cultural phenomena before they undergo theoretical processing". He needs to discover "what nature is, what are the cultural realities of marriage and family, the political system, the economic enterprise or legal procedures," i.e. how "how can these facts be treated inductively to give convincing scientific generalizations." Through it he tries to answer the question of whether there is a general scheme that can be applied to all human cultures, which can be useful as a guide for field research and a system of coordinates in comparative study - historical, evolutionary or what it is intended to only describe the general laws of similarity.<sup>1</sup> The functional theory, namely, should serve as a precondition for field research and for comparative analysis of the phenomena of different cultures. It should be the guide to a concrete analysis of culture, that is, its institutional aspects. It should equip the researcher with a clear perspective and with detailed instructions on how to look at and observe what the subject of his observation is.

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<sup>1</sup>Malinovski, B., "Functional theory", in: Magic, science, religion, Case, 361

In the center of Malinowski's attention is culture, and for him culture is the social system. He pointed out:

A) Culture is essentially an instrument by which human beings are in a position to better deal with the specific problems that they face in their environment in the course of meeting their needs.

B) it is a system of objects, activities and attitudes in which each part is a means of achieving the goal.

C) it is one whole in which the various elements are mutually dependent.

D) such activities, attitudes and objects about important and life assignments are organized in institutions such as family, clan, local community, tribe and teams organized for economic cooperation, political, legal and educational activity. "<sup>2</sup>

Culture, namely, is one grand instrument, partly material, partly humane and partly spiritual, through which a person is capable of facing concrete, specific problems. These problems arise from the fact that a person has a body that is subject to various organic needs and lives in an environment that is his best friend in the sense that it provides him with raw materials for his processing and which at the same time is his dangerous enemy because in itself it hides many enemy forces.

Culture, according to Malinowski, grows in the context of meeting the basic biological needs. In the spirit of Marx, he emphasized that a man must first eat, drink, find roof and protection, reproduce his species, etc., so that he can survive. Biological needs are the first, basic imperative of culture. These are the needs "that are dictated by metabolism, then reproduction, physiological conditions of temperature, protection from moisture, wind and direct influence of harmful forces and time, protection from dangerous living animals and human beings, occasional relaxation, use of the muscular and nervous system in movement and regulation of growth ".<sup>3</sup> When the evolution begins, that is, when a person begins to use tools to satisfy these needs and through them facilitate survival, then this list of needs will be supplemented with new, derived needs.

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<sup>2</sup>Malinowski, B., "Functional theory", in: Magic, science, religion, Case, 363

<sup>3</sup>Malinowski, B., "Functional theory", in: Magic, science, religion, Case, 375

Within the framework of satisfying basic needs, the second, instrumental imperative of culture emerges. In order to meet basic needs, people create a new environment with artifacts. They make tools, weapons, places to live, and use new methods for securing survival. Their use changes the character of the basic needs. They satisfy the need for food, but they do it in a particular way, by introducing a whole range of mechanisms-technological, economic, legal, magical, and ethical. They provide reproduction, but they do not achieve this through simple mating, but through a series of regulated procedures, such as regulated courtship, taboos of exogamy, preferential marital arrangements, parenting and family systems, etc. Through them, they provide not only the birth and nourishment of their offspring, but also their upbringing and introducing into the life of the group.

Meeting the basic biological and instrumental needs encourages the formation of a third level of needs - integrative. All the aforementioned activities include cooperation and conflict, and they require the introduction of a system of regulation, a system of values, norms and sanctions around which there is a global consensus, then the procedures of avidity and control. Culture should also face integrative nominees. Malinovski, therefore, divides the needs that satisfy culture in three levels. There are three levels of needs and three types of functional counterparts to confront them. Each level of needs is a prerequisite for the next level.

Through this analysis of the needs Malinovski comes to a more synthetic definition of culture "The culture is a whole composed of partially autonomous, partly coordinated institutions. It is a whole from a series of principles such as the blood community through projection: the boundary in the space associated with the co-operation, the specialization of the activities and, ultimately, not the last, the use of force in the political organization. Every culture owes its wholeness and self-sufficiency to the fact that it satisfies a whole range of basic, instrumental and integrative needs. "<sup>4</sup>

Malinovski analyzes culture through the analysis of the institutions it involves, assessing that such analysis gives the fullest importance to the total society. The institution itself defines it as "a system of values that makes human beings organized or entering into many existing organizations". Membership of an institution "is a group organized according to certain principles of power, the division of functions and the distribution of privileges and

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<sup>4</sup>Malinovski, B., "Functional theory", in: Magic, science, religion, Case, 375



duties." Its rules and norms are "technically acquired skills, customs, legal norms and ethical commands that members accept or are imposed upon them." <sup>5</sup>

The institution is thus a unit of social organization. It has its own structure and in its analysis it should take into account its constituent parts. They are:

- 1) the charter, i.e. the intention or the values for which its members have been organized;
- 2) The membership group of people organized through tasks, privileges, rewards, and through the principles of authority;
- 3) The rules or norms - technical, ethical and legal regulations that are accepted or imposed by the membership, which relate to their skills and their behavior in the group;
- 4) The material apparatus - the part of the total capital of the society that uses the given institution (in the form of wealth, property, instruments) and what derives from it (earnings, profits, equipment, etc.);
- 5) The activities - the actual behavior of membership within their institutional tasks, which is partly related to the ideal, normed by norms and rules, and partly deviates from it;
- 6) Functions - the full results of organized activities that relate to members, other institutions and the society as a whole and which are related to basic, instrumental and integrative needs.<sup>6</sup>

According to Malinowski, the research of institutions based on this analytical scheme does not provide extensive and verifiable knowledge of a culture, that is, of a social system. Every part of this knowledge is important, because there is an essential connection between all parts that are part of the social system. Moreover, everyone can understand it only in the context of the wholeness in which it enters. Every part exists because it meets some current function. Every custom, material object, idea or belief fulfills a vital function; it has its own task in the social whole whose indivisible part it represents. A series of Malinowski's ideas will become the basis for a body of knowledge that represents the core of the functionalist theory. However, some of them, such as the latter, which emphasize the functionality of each of the sections that are part of the social whole, will become the object of criticism by many functionalists.

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<sup>5</sup>Malinowski, B., "Functional theory", in: Magic, science, religion, Case, 301

<sup>6</sup>Malinowski, B., "Functional theory", in: Magic, science, religion, Case, 302

**Conclusion:**

Functionality acquires a large number of supporters, especially within American sociology. However, precisely in the United States, a systematic critique develops in relation to it, which is based primarily on the division of this sociology into two wings, apostrophed as "conservative" and "radical."

Functional sociology was qualified as conservative. A whole series of remarks were addressed, most of which were repeated: that its representatives developed an abstract theory of a society that is not in a direct connection with real social life; that its approach is emphasized holistically and that with emphasis given to the social whole, the concrete phenomena that make up the whole are placed in the background; that it focuses exclusively on the study of the social structure (thus affecting the conservative aspirations of the ruling class and maintains the social order in an unchanged state); that by emphasizing the normative element in social life it neglects the role of conflict both in the realization of social integration and in the achievement of social progress; that by emphasizing the harmonious nature of the social system it produces a one-sided image of social reality, which lacks the components of social change and social disagreement.

Attacks on functionalists gained in strength during the sixties, when the student movement began to flare up. Then, in the context of this critique, which is gaining more and more political coloring, a new school is formed in American sociology-conflict theory. Most of these attacks, in fact, can be addressed to every school in contemporary sociology. Schools of modernity, aware of the complexity of the subject they need to explore - a complex modern society, do not set the task of perceiving it as a whole, but rather getting to know one or a number of its aspects. Hence, the purpose of investigating the structure is a partial goal, such as the goal of investigating the role of the conflict, the role of socialization, the elements that compose everyday life, and so on. The attack involving political qualifications again hides the problems of sociology as a science.

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